

23rd July

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life... Revelation 22:1,2a.


Diary writing – and some lines of Shakespeare to learn

Are you still keeping your diary? The lesson for April 30th has some good suggestions as to why you might like to do this if you do not do it already. You may not want to write in your diary every day perhaps; once or twice a week would be fine. There are good reasons for keeping a diary. Robert Francis Kilvert (1840-1879), rector of Clyro in Radnorshire (now Powys), explained some of them in his own diary:

“Why do I keep this voluminous journal?” He wrote, “I can hardly tell. Partly because life appears to me such a curious and wonderful thing that it seems a pity that even such a humble and uneventful life as mine should pass altogether away without some such record as this, and partly too because I think the record may amuse and interest some who come after me.”

Those are good reasons. Another good reason is to record God's providence and his goodness to us over the years. This can be of great comfort and help to those who come after us.

On **July 23rd** 1870 Robert Francis Kilvert recorded:

 *Mrs. H. has two pet toads, which live together in a deep hole in the bottom of a stump of an old tree. She feeds them with bread crumbs when they are at home, and they make a funny little plaintive squeaking noise when she calls them. Sometimes they are [away] from home, especially in the evenings.*



In the kitchen live a pair of doves in a large cage, and the house is filled with their soft sweet deep cooing.

I wonder if you know the exact difference between a frog and a toad? The frog is usually a yellow-brown-green colour with a glossy skin and the toad a dusty grey-brown and its skin is dull, warty and rough. If you pick one up you will notice that the frog is moist but the toad is dry. The frog can jump but the toad always gets around by walking. Can you tell which picture on the right shows a frog and which a toad?¹



Toads (and frogs) have always fascinated people and they often make an appearance in stories. You will find another one of Beatrix Potter's stories that includes a toad in today's Optional Resources files.² There are many myths about toads too. Because the toad's skin is warty, for instance, people thought that touching a toad could give you warts! Some people still think toads are poisonous but the common toad which can be found in Britain is not poisonous and can be handled quite safely.



People also used to think that inside a toad's head was a stone with special properties. If you could get hold of one it would be very useful because it would “sweat” or change colour in the presence of poison. It would even extract the poison if placed on a snake bite. Such “toadstones” were often made into jewellery but in fact they not only had no useful properties at all but they did not come from toads either. They were fossilised teeth of an extinct fish called a lepidotes that were collected and sold as “toadstones”! For once Shakespeare did not get it quite right when he wrote:

¹ Top picture is the toad.

² We had her famous *Tale of Peter Rabbit* on 30th April.

*Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.*³

These lines may be a little askew when it comes to the toadstone, but they are worth learning by heart and they do commend a good attitude. “Adversity” means “hardship” or “difficulty” and it does indeed have “sweet uses” although we may not be aware of them at the time. It is also true that we can learn from observing trees, brooks, stones and other features of the “natural” world around us because all these things are a witness to the amazing wisdom of their heavenly designer.

Shakespeare makes one other mistake about the kind of toad likely to be found in his Forest of Arden – can you spot it?⁴

If you find a toad in your garden, feed it some crumbs (or even better meal-worms as found in commercially available bird foods) and it will soon be your friend – which is handy because toads (and frogs) eat snails and slugs. This is why Mrs H.'s toads were often away from their home in the evenings when the slugs and snails come out! Speak to your toad and it will learn your voice and perhaps come when you call.⁵

At the present time of year we often get thunderstorms. This is because if there is much moisture in the air at the same time as high summer temperatures, a very large amount of warm damp air rises into the atmosphere and forms a tall thunder cloud. On **23rd July** 1873 Robert Francis Kilvert wrote in his diary:



At 2 a.m. Began the great lightening storm. It was a beautiful glorious sight as I sat at my open window watching it. For an entire hour the lightening and thunder scarcely ceased playing and rolling in a circle round the house. The constant flaring of the broad brilliant lightening lightened up the country like the brightest sunshine. The Common, the fences, every tree and hedge stood out with the most vivid and terrible directness.

Then the lightening rushed upwards as if from the earth in dazzling shoots of rose-coloured flame and fierce showers of brilliant sparks. The lightening showed all colours by turn, green, rose colour, white, red, yellow and violet. Once there came a fierce and terrine glare so blinding that for some seconds afterwards everything seemed pitch black and I feared I had lost my sight.

There were lights in the houses all over the village and the cottage doors and windows were opened wide to let the lightening out easily if it should come in. The storm passed away to the eastward quietly in a quarter of an hour's heavy rain without doing us any harm, thank God.

Storm safety

There are many wrong ideas about storms such as “lightening always strikes the tallest object” or “lightning never strikes the same place twice”. In fact, lightning will strike the best conductor on the ground, regardless of height or whether it has ever been struck by lightening before. It is true, however, that when you can hear thunder you are already within range of where the next ground flash could occur. This is because lightning can strike as far as 10 miles away from the centre of a

³ *As You Like It*. A beautifully illustrated children's version of this play can be found on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive, available from <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com>.

⁴ He calls it “venomous” meaning “poisonous”. Ugly is a matter of opinion too: I think toads are rather cute!

⁵ More about toads in the garden here: <https://www.wildlifegardener.co.uk/jeff-durham-3.html#more-117>

storm. Notice what the villagers did during the storm, according to Robert Kilvert. This was a common practice even in recent times, especially in country areas. “When I used to be at my gran's house,” said one older person, “if it started thundering she would open the back and front door to let the thunderbolt roll through....” This is obviously an “old wives' tale” but do you know what you should do in a bad thunderstorm, especially if you are caught outdoors? Here are some tips:

If you are caught out in storm seek shelter if possible but not under trees.

Avoid water and find a low-lying open place that is a safe distance from trees, poles or metal objects.

Be aware that metal objects can conduct or attract lightning, including bicycles, wheelchairs, pushchairs, metal gates and wire fencing.

If you are in a tent the advice used to be to try to stay away from the poles. However, modern tents have mostly fibreglass poles rather than metal which are not dangerous in a storm.

If you find yourself in an exposed location it may be advisable to squat close to the ground, with hands on knees and with head tucked between them.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about thunderstorms is that in Britain the number of deaths caused by lightning per year is less than *0.05 per million* people! So probably the most sensible thing to do is to follow Robert Kilvert's example and sit back and enjoy this display of the Creator's power.